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ABSTRACT

In order for a college to thrive in the education/training situation likely to prevail in the 1990s, it may need to move from its existing management structure--which is probably hierarchical--to an alternative management structure. A hierarchical structure has some strengths, such as a clear delineation of responsibilities, the division of work into defined areas, division of the organization into manageable units, and senior manager controls. However, there are inherent weaknesses in the hierarchical structure, such as lack of flexibility, lack of communication, tendency of communication that does occur to be top-down, and lack of innovation. Some organizations can simply modify the existing management structure. However, if the structure will not allow the college to achieve its mission/purpose/plan, it is time to look at alternative structures. If the college is ready for change, there are a range of alternatives that are usually described by the term "matrix." In a matrix structure, control is separated between product management and function management. Various matrix models include the collegial model, the star model, and the autonomous model. (Guidelines are offered for introducing and implementing a matrix management structure.) (KC)

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Alternative management structures — a cautious approach

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ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES - A CAUTIOUS APPROACH

INTRODUCTION

This paper is not another paper about "matrix" management as the alternative to hierarchical organisational structures in educational institutes; although it is inevitable that the paper will in substance refer to both. This paper is about moving from your existing management structure to an alternative one which enables the "college" to thrive in the education - training situation likely to prevail in the 1990's.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

In an educational institution, it is likely that you still work in what remains a hierarchy. The characteristics of the organisation are that there is a line of command from a leader with power at the top of the structure, through a number of levels of subordinates to employees at the base of the organisation; basically everyone is responsible to the person above them. The hierarchy is usually built up of departments, sections or units. The strengths of such an arrangement are:-

- a clear unambiguous definition of who has responsibility and is accountable for whom and what and to whom.

- the division of work into defined areas: in education this is usually vocational areas, disciplines or clearly recognised task and skill areas

- it divides the organisation into manageable units

- senior managers have traditionally considered that they are in "control" of the units.

There have, of course, always been specialists and services which have operated across a hierarchy; the librarian and more recently the computer studies service are examples of such cross college services usually appreciated, whilst general studies has often been less appreciated and without real influence: even when they may have a lot to offer to the development of a vocationally based unit.

Many educational hierarchies have tinkered with this structure, with varying specific success and without it leading to a general recommendation that this is the way to really make your management structure more effective.

We can all think of examples e.g. The College staff development officer who is graded at LI and therefore has no real weight in the organisation and whose activities can be marginalised.

- The keen Head of Department who takes on Staff Development and Marketing and ends up without the time to do any area really well.

The Head of a very large department who threatens the Principals position and is moved to Director of Marketing to minimise his influence.

These activities rarely overcome the inherent weaknesses in the hierarchy which are:-

- lack of flexibility, particularly when the institution as a whole has got to be flexible.

- lack of communication, particularly that which would enable all those capable of contributing to a flexible institution to pay their full part in events.

- a tendency for communication that does occur to be down the hierarchy

- hierarchies tend to be relatively non-innovative organisations and although new ideas emerge within units, it is rare for ideas and creative responses which benefit the organisation as a whole to emerge; very often because in colleges the units are competitive, e.g. because they are competing for resources of all types, or an even sadder example, because the only way that the Principal of a college can cope, is to encourage competition, the "divide and rule" situation.

DO YOU NEED TO CHANGE?

If your organisation has a hierarchical management structure, or is a hierarchy with a few cross college modifications, do you really need to change the management structure? All that may be required are some organisational, administrative staff and personnel-interpersonnel changes, without changing the fundamental management structure. A process that can be brought about with some staff development, after staff appraisal; an effective programme of team building, learning how to run meetings better, time management skills, the effective use of the management information systems, more industrial links and advisory committees, more money and a few early retirements or redundancies. Changing to an alternative management structure is not a way of getting out of the problems that arise in a hierarchy; this would be a negative way of approaching an alternative management structure. The only reason for looking at an alternative management structure is because the exisitng structure, assumed to be a hierarchy, will not allow the college to achieve its mission/purpose/plan - where it is going and where it has GOT TO BE in a specified period of time.

Therefore the logical starting point for a college to be when considering alternative management structures is to consider its mission/purpose/plan and to make the considered decision that the only way it will achieve it is through the opportunities opened up by an alternative management structure.

However, such logic rarely prevails and it is likely that the college will have to look at alternative management structures at the same time; as considering what its mission is, how it will change in the face of all the change pressures that are upon it and continuing with its current activities, in a climate which many within the educational system still do not see as becoming increasingly de-stabilised.

Bureaucratic structures, such as hierarchical management, are designed to do programmable things in a stable predictable environment. More and more programmable things can be mechanised and automated. More and more, the environment is unstable and rapidly changing. The present need is for modes or organisation which permit rapid adaptation to changing circumstances; the search is for ways in which people can organise for innovative unprogrammable activities. The hierarchy cannot cope with this very flexible situation.

THE BACKGROUND TO CHANGING MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Assuming that there is a mission/purpose/plan for a college, there also has to be a climate within the college which allows any change in management structure to be effective; this is often referred to as the culture of the college and a healthy culture is the desired state. Primarily the climate/culture/health of a college is about the attitudes of the people that work in it - to their particular job and to each other. To establish the climate in which a change of management structure is likely to be effective, we can review the college from this stand point.

The following checklist and the answers we get can guide us in deciding whether or not an alternative management structure will succeed.

The college that is ready for an alternative management structure is one where:-

- management already gives clear goals to staff, helps then reach them and praises/values the achievement of the goals

- as far as is reasonable practises a full exchange of information with all staff - open management

- staff are given authority as well as responsibility and are encouraged to take responsibility for developments and own the outcomes

- it is acknowledged that management have the right to manage, they must be seen to manage, highly visible and with total involvement (which does not mean interference) in who they are managi g.

- all staff should be willing to use resources with maximum flexibility for the good of the college

- as well as being critical to the planning and delivery of curriculum, staff should be involved in its evaluation and the action then required to modify the design of that which is on offer.

This list is virtually endless, but the examples given illustrate the idea that the climate must already be good for an alternative management structure to succeed; an alternative management structure introduced to change a really bad college climate is unlikely to succeed.

Once again we can pose the question - Do we need an alternative management structure? If the questions posed above provide answers that indicate weaknesses in the college climate/culture/health, perhaps the college can go forward if weaknesses are remedied. Let us assume that improving the working of the existing management structure is not enough, what are the alternatives that are available.

ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

The alternatives to the hierarchical management structure are a range of alternatives which are usually described by the term matrix. I must stress that these are a range of alternatives, through which an organisation can evolve, whilst abandoning the hierarchy completely, or retaining aspects of it which are considered desirable.

In a matrix structure control is separated between product management and function management, or in terms of colleges of further education between two main managers; a manager for courses on one hand and a manager for resources on the other. There are extensions of the concept which mean that control operates in more than two directions and this will be illustrated by examples.

The fundamental change for the individual is that often a change must be made from a "whole person" role in the hierarchy to the situation where the person is split into two or more roles, which must only intrude on one another where this is a requirement of the organisation.

A new problem is that the applications of the matrix structure of management to educational institutions as developed in the 1970's and 1980's may not be adequate for the 1990's, where an educational organisation may be managing all of the following activities to be viable:-

- deployment of resources for planned and reasonably stable full time, part-time and short courses; the further evolution of the traditional work (the core activities) of the college

- the rapid deployment of teaching/learning resources for situations where a quick response is critical if the activities are to take place

- joint/partnership activities with a growing number of other providers of learning opportunities; schools, continuing education, adult education, community education, commercial training organisations.

- the use of staff (teaching, technical and other) for a range of non-standard money earning activities; e.g. consultancy, demonstrations, services.

- the use of a wide range of college resources and facilities to earn money and which perhaps taking precedence over the teaching/learning activities.

Developments such as a modular curriculum, student centred learning, minimum effective class contact hours, etc. will enable these other activities of the viable college to be carried out without lowering the core learning quality and although not of themselves management activities; their management implications will have to be accommodated in any alternative management structure.

Before we consider the advantages and problems of matrices, some attention will be given to what actually happens in the various matrix models. There are variations and these have been described as follows:-

THE COLLEGIAL MODEL

This can operate in small educational organisations. It works on the principal that decisions are made collectively and that responsibility for action is the responsibility of the whole group; although one person may be designated to be responsible for co-ordination. The members of such a group learn to act jointly and take collective responsibility and there has to be considerable emphasis on interpersonal relationships and group interaction. I am quite sure many organisations actually work in this way when they are ineffectively managed by the official hierarchy. The problems with this form of alternative management structure are primarily those presented by strong personalities within the group, which depends on following through group decisions, even when they are not agreed by every individual within the group. Another problem is detailing the precise responsibilities of individuals in such a group.

Many Principals of colleges with small staff numbers claim that they manage in this way, but it is very difficult for anyone of strong personality or the slightest autocratic tendency to treat him/herself as one of a group of equals.

THE STAR MODEL

This is also known as the family model and is found in small organisations. Although essentially non-bureaucratic it depends for its control on a leader who acts in a personal way; the leader is the "head of the family" around which the organisation revolves. This is a common management model for primary schools and some departments in further education colleges and higher education. The strength and weaknesses lie primarily in the leader of the group; if he/she fails, the group fails, Many staff are happy in this type of situation but some find it de-motivating; whilst entreprenuerial groups managed in this way are usually not highly innovative and as the leader gets out of touch so the groups get out of touch.

THE AUTONOMOUS MODEL

This model assumes that the professional individual is left to organise himself/herself. This model operates in may areas of education but is not helpful for an organisation planning to survive.

In our cautious approach to alternative management structures it is worth while having a very honest look at the organisation in which we work and deciding which parts of it are actually working in a way which is:-

HIERARCHIC COLLEGIAL STAR AUTONOMOUS

Perhaps you organisation is already being managed by alternative management structures.

MATRIX STRUCTURES

The attached diagram gives a generalised form of matrix which the author is proposing, to manage a college deploying its resources in a flexible way and faced with the situation also shown in diagramatic form.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES (MATRICES)

ADVANTAGES

- They should allow for a blend of stable college activities together with temporary projects.

- They should allow for the deployment of all the resources of a college in a flexible way.

- They should allow for maximum effective communication between all staff.

- They should create a situation in which all staff are able to make their maximum contribution to the college.

- They should create a situation in which "good" and "bad" activities cannot be hidden or ignored.

- They should allow all sub-college goals that are useful to be integrated into the overall college goal.

DISADVANTAGES

- Those working in a matrix need to abandon being a "whatever" and be happy taking on a number of defined roles, allocating time effectively to each of them and adjusting attitudes and managerial behaviour to the needs of the different roles.

- Frustrations and fears if workers in a matrix feel insecure, experience a loss of identity and feel threatened; particularly by colleagues over whom they had "power" in a former hierarchical system.

CONCLUSIONS

The college that needs to become more flexible, to enter new markets effectively and to bring in money in every reasonable way, needs to consider alternative management structures to the hierarchy.

A college can make these changes in stages and should do so, testing each change and moving on or back as experience dictates. In the changing situation which we are likely to now always work in, the ideal management structure will need frequent re-assessment to maintain effectiveness and this evaluation mechanism should be part of our structure.

The key to success of structures alternate to the hierarchy, is the willingness to give up "power". This starts at the top. Whilst remaining responsible, the Principal needs to give power to the principalship. If the Principal's partners, now possibly Assistant Principal's and probably former Heads of Department, do not give up their old Departmental power to the new course and vocational area leaders, those with resource management responsibilities, marketing and staff development functions etc. - a critical imbalance in the alternative management structure will quickly show itself. The move to an alternative management structure needs careful preparation, in the LEA and its political connections, in the college and the community it serves.

If and when the time is right to move:-

- BASE WHAT IS DONE ON THE MISSION/PURPOSE/PLAN FOR THE COLLEGE

- DRAW UP A PROGRAMME TO MOVE INTO AN ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE THAT HAS ENOUGH FLEXIBILITY, BOTH IN WHO DOES WHAT AND WHEN BY

- AS FAR AS IS REASONABLE, KEEP THE WHOLE DEVELOPMENT "OPEN" - CONSULT AND RE-CONSULT. INFORM ALL DECISION THOROUGHLY

- RECOGNISE THE NEED FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT FAR IN EXCESS OF THAT WHICH APPEARS NECESSARY TO THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY EXPERIENCED MANAGERS AND LIKELY TO BE LEADING THE CHANGE

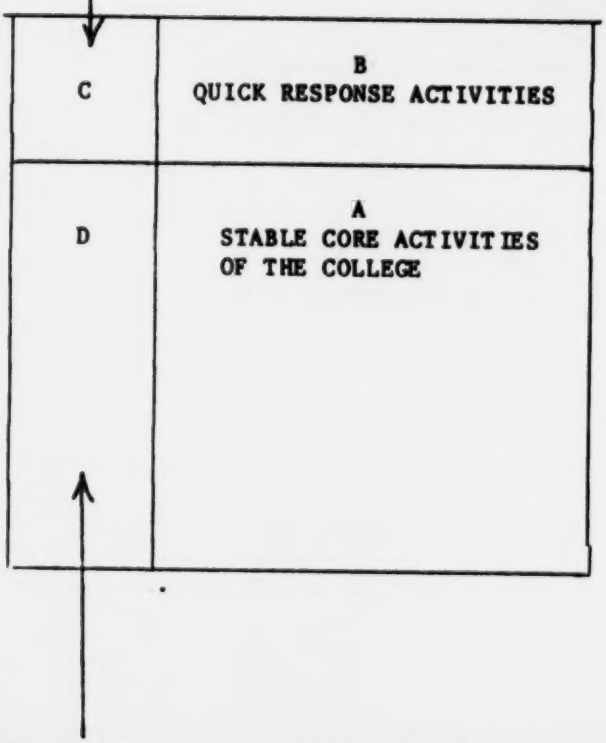
- RECOGNISE THE NEED FOR STAFF COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT, WHICH MAY NOT HAVE BEEN NECESSARY WITHIN THE SAFETY OF A HIERARCHY

- EVALUATE, BE PREPARED TO ADMIT THE ALTERNATIVE IS NOT DOING WHAT WAS INTENDED AND MODIFY THE ALTERNATIVE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE ACCORDINGLY

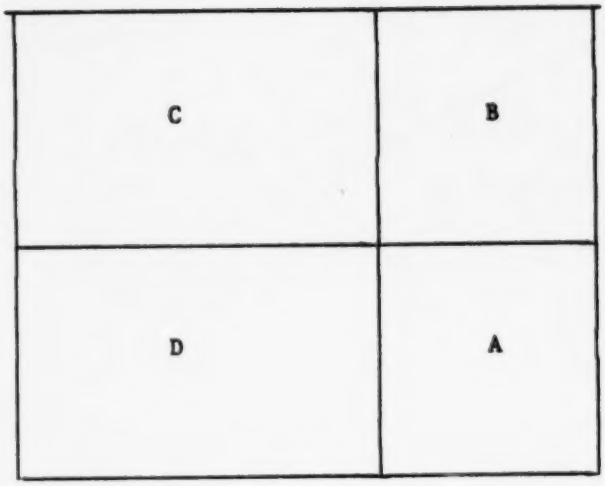
- BE PREPARED FOR SOME HARD DECISIONS AND A HARD ROAD WITH THOSE FEW STAFF THAT CANNOT MAKE THE CHANGE, EVEN THOUGH IT CAN BE DEMONSTRATED THAT IS IS FOR THE GOOD OF THE "COLLEGE", WHICH MEANS THE TOTALITY OF STAFF, STUDENTS AND THE COMMUNITY ITS MISSION IS DESIGNED TO SERVE.

THE PROACTIVE/RESPONSIVE COLLEGE

MONEY EARNING USE OF RESOURCES OTHER THAN PROVIDING LEARNING EXPERIENCES CONTROLLED BY COLLEGE STAFF



DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES TO ALLOW A+B+C TO BE EFFECTIVE AND WELL MANAGED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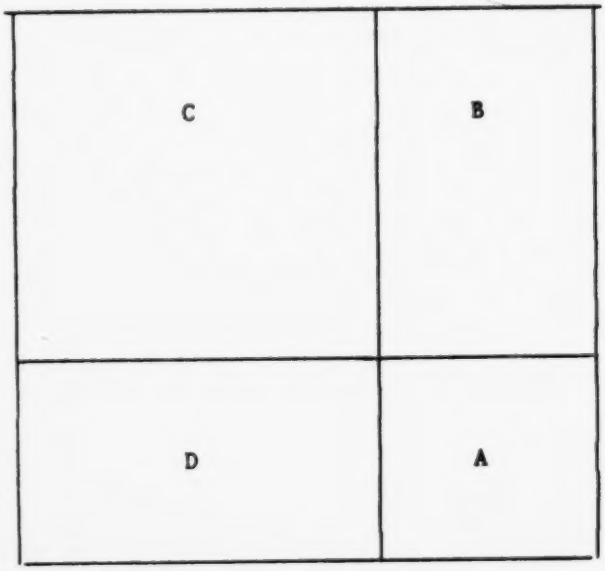
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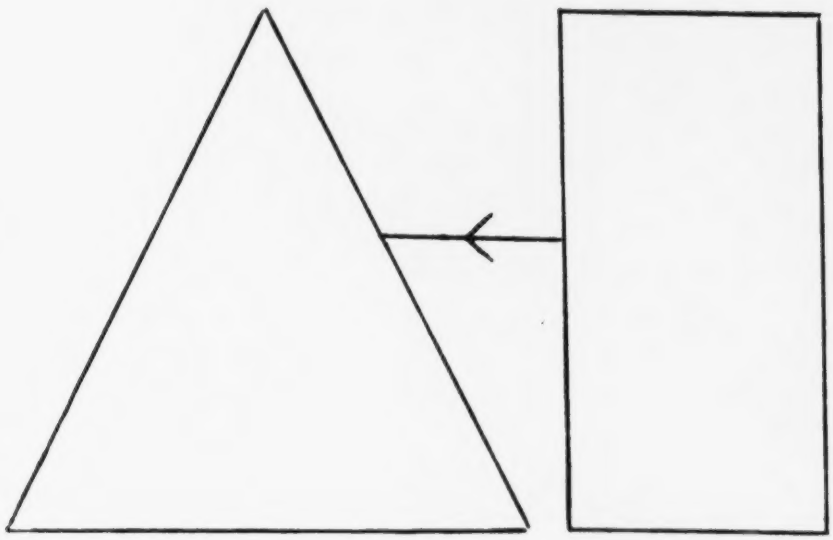
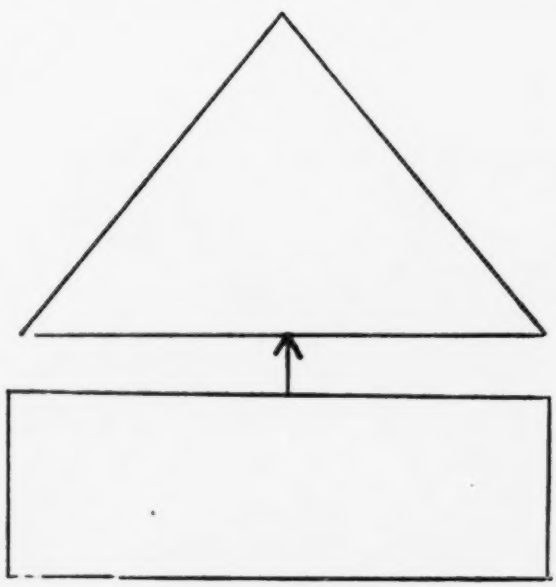
THE HIERARCHY

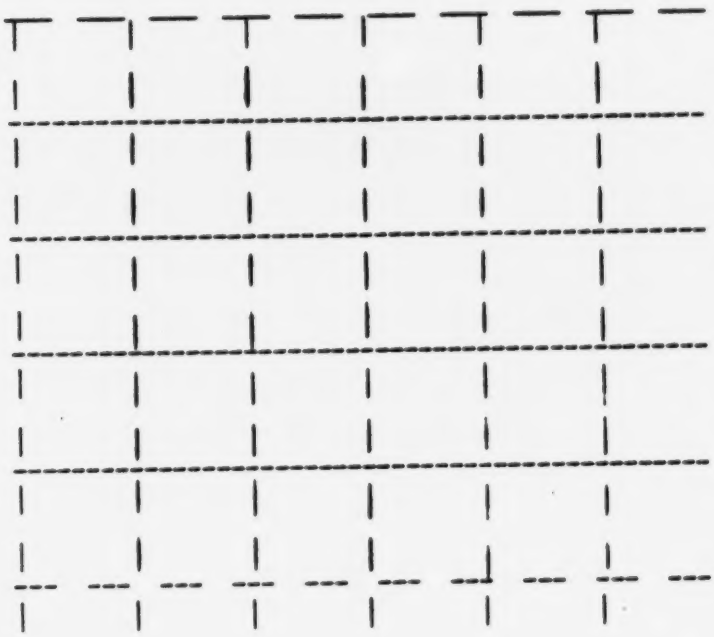




MATRIX

THE PRINCIPALSHIP ⟶

DISCIPLINE LEADERS

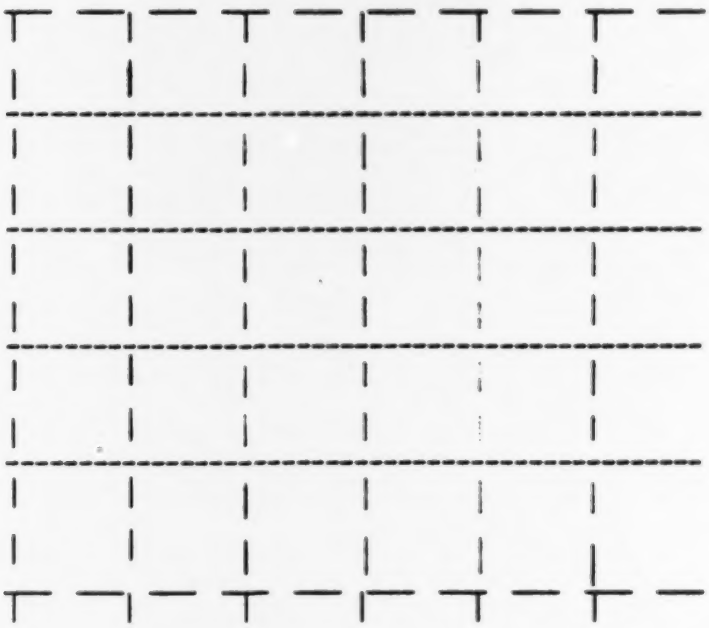


COURSE LEADERS

MATRIX

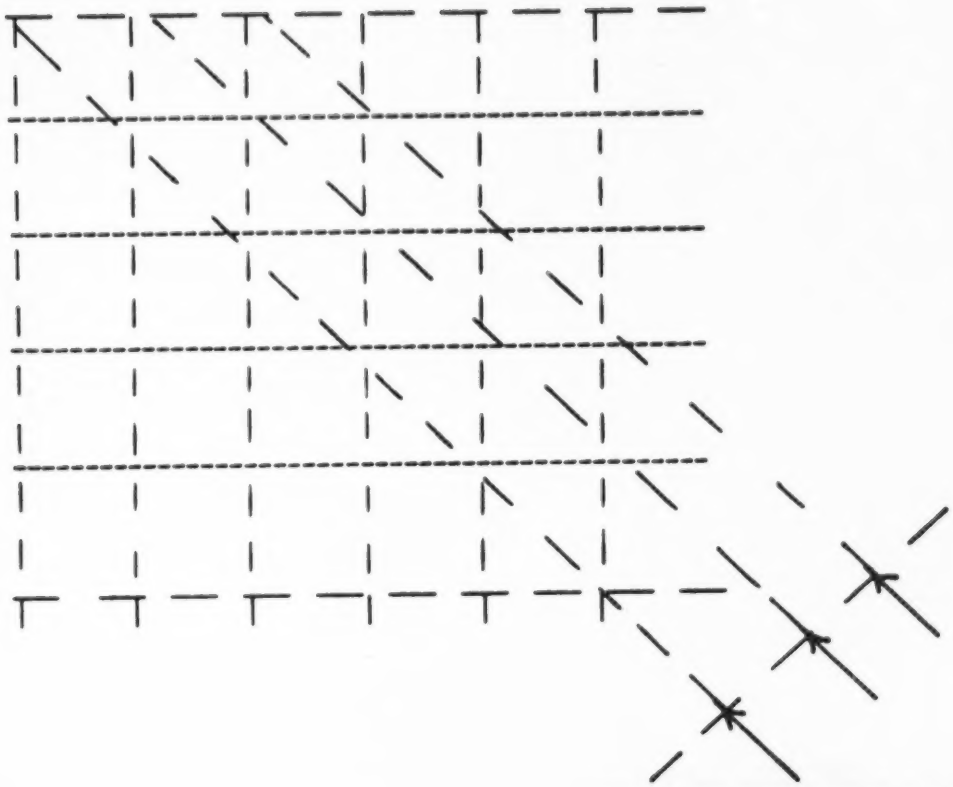
THE PRINCIPALSHIP ⟶

VOCATIONAL AREA LEADERS



CROSS COLLEGE
UNITS
eg IT COMMUNICATIONS

MATRIX



THOSE WHO HAVE FOUND A NEED AND NOW REQUIRE RESOURCES QUICKLY: TO DELIVER A CONTRACT AND EARN MONEY